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Inside Information

United States Department
of Agriculture

Office of Information

Washington, D.C. 20250

VOL. 6, NUMBER 20

October 22, 1984

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BETTER ASCS INFO DISSEMINATION PLANNED

It costs \$110 million and it will take until mid-1987 to be completely in place across the Nation. "It" is SCOAP, for "State and County Office Automation Project," a nationwide computer linkage announced by USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

Ray Waggoner, information director at ASCS, can already see how it will affect his system of getting out the news.

New announcements on farm programs will reach the 2,882 county offices of ASCS within minutes rather than several days, as soon as the system is in place.

For years, Waggoner recalls, farmers have read about new farm programs in newspapers or heard about them on television but found that county officials had no official information on the program because the details had not arrived by mail.

The announcements are sent immediately from Washington to State-ASCS offices by facsimile transmission but then the State offices have to duplicate these and mail them to the county offices.

It might be a week before the county offices get the facts officially, Waggoner says.

This situation still exists in all the States. But in January, under the ASCS contract with IBM Corporation, 185 IBM System/36 computers will be placed in State and county offices in California, Kansas and South Carolina. By mid-1987, the agency will be completely automated.

Waggoner is turning out a 20-page special edition of his inhouse "News and Views" to explain the project to each of ASCS' nearly 13,000 employees.

Eventually, that newsletter will be transmitted electronically, too, as will Waggoner's general release forms on new topics which can be rewritten for local use.

Everything going out of Waggoner's information office to State and local offices will go electronically as soon as computer capability is realized.

Waggoner can see the day when farmers will be able to unload ASCS fact sheets directly into their home computers. He can even foresee farmers signing up for programs directly through their private computers.

FOLLOW-UP TIME ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS BASELINE

Remember the lead article in the Aug. 27, 1984, "Inside Information" -- about the Congressional/OMB request for information on the amount of money spent by Federal agencies on public affairs, public relations and advertising activities?

USDA agencies had to report 1984 budgets for those activities to the Office of Management & Budget by late August.

The reports, it turns out, vary from zero in several agencies to nearly \$6 million in the Forest Service.

USDA agencies reporting zero expenditures in fiscal 1984 were: Agricultural Cooperative Service, Agricultural Research Service, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service, Cooperative State Research Service, Departmental Administration, Economic Research Service, Extension Service, Federal Grain Inspection Service, Human Nutrition Information Service, National Agricultural Library, Office of General Counsel, Office of Inspector General, Office of International Cooperation & Development, Office of the Secretary, Office of Transportation, Packers & Stockyards Administration, Statistical Research Service and World Agricultural Outlook Board.

Reporting a budget of \$342,000 was USDA's Office of Governmental & Public Affairs (mostly the Office of Information).

Forest Service reported \$5,724,000; Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, \$1,650,000; Agricultural Marketing Service, \$650,000; Soil Conservation Service, \$395,000; Agricultural Stabilization & Conservation Service, \$346,000; Food & Nutrition Service, \$285,000; Food Safety & Inspection Service, \$204,000; Office of Rural Development Policy, \$25,000; Farmers Home Administration, \$6,000; Foreign Agricultural Service, \$6,000; and Rural Electrification Administration, \$5,000.

By this reckoning, USDA expenditures for 1984 in public affairs, public relations and advertising activities totaled \$9,638,000. This compares to the \$100 million that the Congress requires be cut from such activities throughout the Federal government in 1985.

The law, passed this summer, also requires reductions of \$250 million in Federal government publishing, printing, reproduction and audiovisual activities.

USDA reported a baseline of \$35,702,000 in such expenditures in 1984. All the agencies reported expenditures in this category. Forest Service topped the field again at \$6,296,000. Second position went to the Agricultural Stabilization & Conservation Service, at \$5,471,000.

The Office of Governmental & Public Affairs reported \$2,433,000.

USDA's Office of Budget & Program Analysis does not expect a response to these reports from OMB until the end of November.

OMB had asked each Federal agency to provide a 1984 baseline for those activities so that the desired amount could be reduced in fiscal 1985.

Attached to this directive, however, was this statement, which seems to be a copy of a conference committee report:

"As agreed to by the conferees, section 2901(a)(1)(C) no longer refers to 'public information activities' as one of the areas in which reductions are to be identified. Conferees concluded that reductions are appropriate in the areas of public relations and advertising by agencies. However, they agreed that providing information on the operations of government generally or pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act specifically, should not be affected by this section."

THREE AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS MERGE

Three agricultural development organizations founded by the Rockefeller family have announced plans to merge and maintain new headquarters at the foot of Petit Jean Mountain in Arkansas' Conway County, according to a recent UPI news story.

The new organization will be called Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development. It will be formed by the consolidation of three nonprofit organizations engaged in agricultural development and research in the United States and 20 other countries.

The three organizations are Winrock International Livestock Research & Training Center (based at the site of the new headquarters), the Agricultural Development Council of New York and the International Agricultural Development Service of Arlington, Va.

Norman Borlaug, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in improving wheat production in developing countries, is listed as a member of the board of the new organization.

Mason Miller, communications officer with the Winrock International Livestock Research & Training Center, says he is not sure exactly what the new organization means for his shop.

"We will still be located here at Winrock International, and do much of the same work we do now," Miller says. "But we'll be adding to it the publications editing and other materials preparation and production work that ADC and IADS now do for themselves in various ways."

Miller is the former communications officer for USDA's Cooperative State Research Service.

6TH ANNUAL MEDIA CONFERENCE PLANNED

"Impact!" is the theme of the 6th Annual National Media Conference sponsored by Larimi Communications Associates. The conference will be held at the New York Hilton Hotel in New York City on Dec. 4-5.

Some of the speakers at the 2-day event will include Mike Wallace of CBS-TV; Hugh Downs of ABC-TV; Jody Powell, former Presidential press secretary; Florence Skelly, president of Yankelovich, Skelly & White; Allen Hammond, editor of SCIENCE '84; Carol Tabor, publisher of WORKING WOMAN; Walter Pfister, Jr., president of Executive Television Workshop; Herbert Schmertz, Mobil Oil; and Richard Weiner, president of Richard Weiner, Inc.

Registration fee for the conference is \$550, unless you register early or are a member of the Public Relations Society of America or the International Association of Business Communicators.

For further information, call Karen Devoti, conference registration coordinator at (212) 935-9262, or write to Larimi Communications Associates, Ltd., Education Division, 246 West 38th Street, New York, NY 10018.

COMMTX INTERNATIONAL SET FOR JANUARY

COMMTX International and the 46th annual convention of NAVA, the International Communications Industries Association, will be held in Anaheim, Calif., on Jan. 16-21, 1985. For further details, contact NAVA at 3150 Spring Street, Fairfax, VA 22031

HELPFUL HINTS AVAILABLE FOR TV INTERVIEWS

Russell Forte, public affairs specialist in the News Division of USDA's Office of Information, picked up several suggestions for top executives facing radio/tv interviews when he attended a course on the subject made available by New York University.

Some suggestions are:

Remember you're selling a product. Spend lots of time preparing. Develop the three most positive statements about your activity. State your conclusion in your opening statement. And, once you're in the interview, don't be disarmed by the interviewer's friendliness.

These points are developed and many others listed in an informal report that Forte has prepared. It's available by writing to Forte at Room 408A, News Division, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250. His telephone number is (202) 447-9120, and the Dialcom electronic mailbox is AGR003.

Forte's boss, News Division chief Jim Lafferty, notes that there are at least three people available to aid USDA executives in preparing for interviews: Lafferty, Forte and John McClung, director of information.

All you have to do is (admit you need help, then) ask for their assistance.

Lafferty notes a similar service is available to help scientists overcome their fear (or distrust) of the press.

EGG BOARD NAMES COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

The American Egg Board--home of the "the incredible edible egg"--has named G. Steve Grenade as its communications manager.

Grenade, 30, was assistant editor with the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station at Auburn University for 5 years before taking his new job.

Currently working on his master's thesis in communications/public relations, Grenade graduated from Auburn's J-school in 1976.

A few weeks ago, Herbert C. Jackson left his American Egg Board position as director of producer relations to become executive vice president of MICRU International at Chicago, Ill. MICRU is the independent users' society connected with the Microdata Corporation, a California-based computer company.

Jackson, as many will recall, headed USDA's regional public information office in Chicago for a number of years before the office was closed in early 1983. He holds a degree in agricultural communications from the University of Illinois.

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, State Departments of Agriculture and Land Grant Universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250 or to AGR002 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

